

Insecure employment

**citizens
advice**

Sheffield

**Report from
interviews with
clients**

Executive summary

New, flexible patterns of work, and their impact on workers, have been subject to public debate for some time now. Court cases and high-profile reviews keep these issues in the headlines. A recent estimate suggests that at least £2.7 billion is lost each year due to withholding of pay to which people are legally entitled. The withdrawal of legal aid for employment cases has severely limited the capacity to enforce rights and seek redress.

People who approach us at Citizens Advice Sheffield for help with their employment are struggling day-to-day with the problems that modern working patterns can cause, including non-payment of wages and infringement of the National Minimum Wage. Through their accounts we glimpse the distress and hardship that questionable employment practices can cause individuals and families trying their best to make a living. We decided to examine Sheffield residents' experiences through a series of in-depth interviews, to broaden our understanding of the issues and inform our thinking about solutions.

Our interviewees' experiences showed:

- People don't know what their employment rights are, or where to find information about them, often because they expect that employers will comply with the law so they should never need this information;
- Employers withhold contractual documents and don't inform people of their employment status or type of contract, making it difficult for workers to know and pursue their rights;
- Employers become elusive and uncommunicative when employees experience problems and seek to resolve them;
- Most people never considered starting Employment Tribunal proceedings (with or without fees as a factor), feeling instead that their best option was to look for another job and write off their bad experience;
- Some people were disappointed in ACAS' services;
- Citizens Advice Sheffield's capacity to help is severely limited by resource constraints;
- Problems stemming from insecure employment result in real hardship beyond the workplace, including debt and ill-health.

Prior to these interviews, our starting position was that people's existing legal rights are severely undermined by a lack of effective enforcement mechanisms and professional support needed to navigate a complex system. Our regular advice experience had also led us inevitably to the conclusion that some organisations are deliberately taking advantage of current permissive

employment arrangements to exploit and short-change the people who work for them. Our research strongly reinforced these views.

While we welcome the recent abolition of Employment Tribunal fees, we do not believe that this - or the Matthew Taylor review's proposed changes to working practices - will be sufficient to address the difficulties people are experiencing when seeking to enforce their rights, through no fault of their own. As well as these changes, we believe there is a need for:

- a legislative and commercial environment that is hostile to exploitative practices and which positively rewards ethical employers;
- strong enforcement mechanisms with thorough powers to tackle and deter poor practice; and
- better support for people when they need to take action.

To achieve these, we recommend that:

- The 'anchor institutions' in Sheffield – the City Council, the NHS, the universities and so on - consider using their procurement power to insist on ethical employment practices among their suppliers and contractors, emulating the approach pioneered by the Welsh Government and local authorities.
- A local 'Fair Trade'-style campaign be initiated now, under the Sheffield 'Fair City' banner, to harness public spending power in favour of ethical employment practices.
- Government considers legislating to make it compulsory for employers to insure themselves against employment claims, emulating existing compulsory health and safety insurance.
- Government adopts the recent Work and Pensions Select Committee proposal to define everyone legally by default as a 'worker', unless an employer can prove otherwise.
- Government adopts Citizens Advice's proposal for the creation of a Fair Work Authority with substantial powers to act on individuals' behalf, providing early resolution of problems and deterring employers from poor practice.
- Sheffield City Council considers the model for local enforcement of the National Minimum Wage, funded by revenue from fines, as advocated by the London Borough of Newham.
- Individuals' capacity to enforce their rights be supported through funding for casework and representation services, including restoration of legal aid for employment matters to supplement first-tier advice provision.

Context

*"..... the possibility of claims being brought by employees whose rights are infringed must exist, if employment relationships are to be based on respect for those rights. Equally, although it is often desirable that claims arising out of alleged breaches of employment rights should be resolved by negotiation or mediation, those procedures can only work fairly and properly if they are backed up by the knowledge on both sides that a fair and just system of adjudication will be available if they fail. Otherwise, the party in the stronger bargaining position will always prevail. . It is thus the claims which are brought before an ET which enable legislation to have the deterrent and other effects which Parliament intended, provide authoritative guidance as to its meaning and application, and underpin alternative methods of dispute resolution."*¹

In recent years there have been many changes in the composition of the UK's employment market. The rise of umbrella companies, agency work, zero-hours contracts and increasing levels of self-employment have all contributed to a more complex and diverse array of working arrangements. While the resources available to Citizens Advice to pursue casework have declined due to legal aid cuts, the complexity of the employment problems brought to us by our clients has increased. People working in these new forms of employment are understandably confused, and unsure about their legal rights, when their job does not proceed in the manner they had envisaged.

More complex and fragmented employment patterns can make for lack of clarity, at best, and deception, at worst, about pay and entitlements. Recent research by Middlesex University² makes a deliberately conservative estimate, based on what little data is available, that the total losses from unpaid wages due, including non-compliance with the national minimum wage and unauthorised deductions, could equate to an annual sum of £2.7 billion. It is reasonable to assume that these losses to individual workers must have a significant impact on local economies in terms of lost spending power.

¹ JUDGMENT R (on the application of UNISON) (Appellant) v Lord Chancellor (Respondent) <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2015-0233.html>

² <https://unpaidbritain.org/2017/06/15/the-weighted-scales-of-economic-justice-unpaid-britain-interim-report/>

Sheffield is no different from other parts of the country in that increasing numbers of people are reliant on insecure work found through employment agencies, or are involved in either enforced, or, in some cases, bogus self-employment, with little security, few rights and the constant risk of exploitative treatment.

With the recent media coverage of claims brought against gig economy companies such as Uber and Deliveroo, and the publication of Matthew Taylor's review of modern employment practices³ commissioned by the Prime Minister, Citizens Advice Sheffield decided it was the right time to undertake an investigation into the barriers faced by people in Sheffield in upholding their employment rights. We would like to thank Richard Pearson, a post-graduate researcher on placement from the University of Sheffield, who conducted this survey work for us, as well as the clients who agreed to be interviewed.

³ 'Good Work: The Taylor review of modern working practices' Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, July 2017.

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/627671/good-work-taylor-review-modern-working-practices-rg.pdf

Our investigation

Citizens Advice is the first port of call for many people experiencing practical and legal difficulties in their everyday lives. Around 8% of the enquiries dealt with in Sheffield in the period January to June 2017 were solely or predominantly about employment rights (552 individual enquiries, from which 221 clients subsequently received more in-depth advice from our employment specialist). Through our work on other key issues such as welfare benefits and debt we can also clearly see that insecure employment and lack of a reliable income underlie the problems of many more of our clients.

Since the removal of legal aid for employment problems, Citizens Advice Sheffield has had insufficient resources to undertake casework and offer representation on such matters and our work has therefore focused on first-tier information and advice – that is, analysis of the client's problems, explanation of their legal rights, and information about options for negotiating with their employer and enforcing their rights. Our help has also included coaching people to call on the resources available to them through unions, ACAS, the Government's national minimum wage enforcement team and possibly through legal cover provided by house insurance etc.

We decided to dig a little deeper to explore the experiences of our clients and understand a little better the barriers they face in dealing with work problems. Our researcher contacted 64 clients who had recently received first-tier employment advice from our specialist employment adviser and 15 consented to complete in-depth telephone interviews on their experiences (see appendix for summaries). In this report we have referred to them by initials only, to preserve their anonymity.

Our interviewees had undertaken a diverse range of jobs across several sectors such as social care and logistics. The majority (53%) were employed through an agency, and had a variety of contractual working arrangements including self-employment, zero-hours, full-time and part-time worker status.

As figure one shows, almost half of clients interviewed took their current employment simply because they needed a job, though the majority had more positive reasons for their choice at the time. A frequently-cited reason for accepting a job offer provided through an agency, or on a zero-hours or self-

employment contract, was the apparent flexibility that this form of work would provide for the individual.

Figure One: Reasons for accepting employment offer

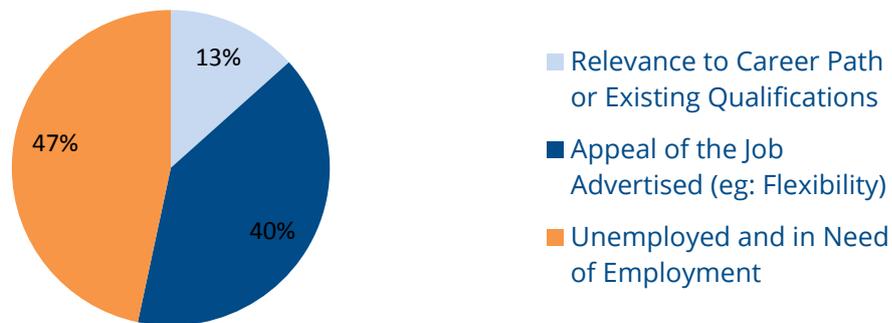


Figure Two: Nature of problems raised by interviewees

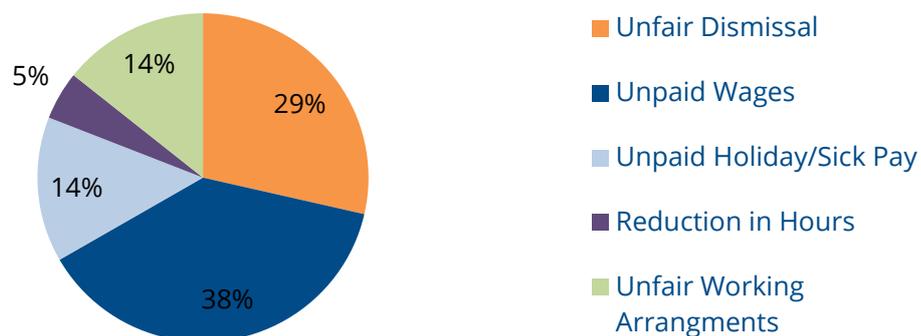


Figure two shows all the primary reasons why our interviewees decided to seek help, with unfair dismissals and unpaid wages being the most common reasons for approaching us. Unpaid holiday and sick pay were also referenced on a few occasions, and a number of clients spoke of the unfairness of their working arrangements, including compulsory requirements to work lengthy shifts despite being on self-employment contracts. Individual clients often cited multiple issues.

Key observations from our interviews

People don't know their employment rights or where to find information about them, often because they expect that employers will comply with the law

Fewer than half of the clients interviewed knew of their right to join a trade union, and only one was a member of a union at the time of our interview. Few had any knowledge of ACAS prior to speaking to Citizens Advice Sheffield. Only six clients knew of their right to access their contractual documents, and just three knew of their right to be accompanied at grievance meetings. Two clients even reported that their employers had explicitly informed them that this was not allowed.

Many interviewees felt that they should not have needed this kind of information, because they assumed that companies and agencies would comply with the law. Some clients also seemed to have been too caught up in the stress and effort of seeking and applying for work to find out about what their rights are. Our client BB typified this view, maintaining that people do not know about employment law because they are more concerned with getting a job to support their family, pay rent, etc. LH assumed that he would not even require a copy of his contract when he started his job as a van driver: "I didn't see a problem, it's a delivery job, I can do it". He also felt that there was a general expectation among Jobcentre Plus staff that people would know what their employment rights were, but thought that this expectation was misguided.

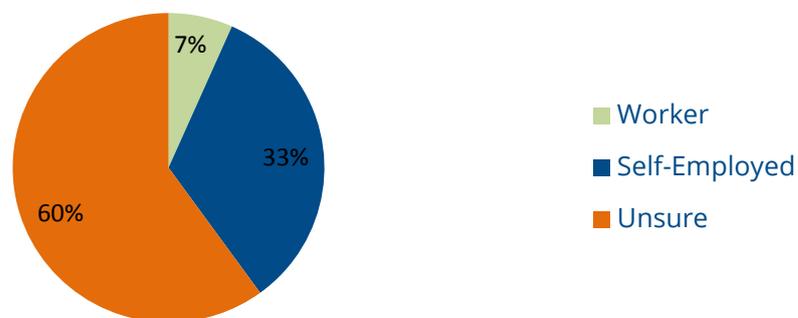
Overall, clients' primary concern was to find work and earn money. More broadly, in doing what Government expects of them by obtaining work, supporting themselves, paying tax etc., there is a reciprocal expectation that the state will provide basic protection from exploitation. Our interviewees felt that Government was not keeping its side of this implied bargain.

Employers withhold contractual documents and don't inform people of their employment status or type of contract

Lack of knowledge of employment rights appears to be further compounded by the substantial proportion of employers who withheld contractual documents from our clients and did not provide them with clear information about their employment status or type of contract. Several interviewees recounted similar experiences whereby they were presented with a large volume of contractual documents at interview or induction, only for these to be taken away once they had been signed, and before our clients had any chance to read them. A number of interviewees expressed a view that they did not need to read over their contractual documents because they assumed they would be treated fairly, and that they knew what they were signing up for.

As figure three shows, a high number of clients also stated that they never knew what their employment status was. The recently-published Taylor review proposed measures to aid people in establishing their employment status: the findings of our research support that recommendation.

Figure Three: Employment status of interviewees



One interviewee assumed she was self-employed due to the nature of her working arrangement. Another concluded she was an employee for the same reason, despite mentioning that her contract stated she was self-employed. GC mentioned that he saw and signed papers at an interview but was not given a chance to read them through because “it was too much paper”. ET said he did ask for a copy of his contract but was told that there “wasn't one available”: he only found out about his right to contractual documents after he had spoken to Citizens Advice Sheffield. He has since tried to e-mail and call his agency to access this information but has hit numerous stumbling blocks.

Figure four shows the low numbers of clients who saw a copy of their contract, and the even lower numbers who were given a take-home copy or knew where they could get one.

Figure Four: Contractual documents

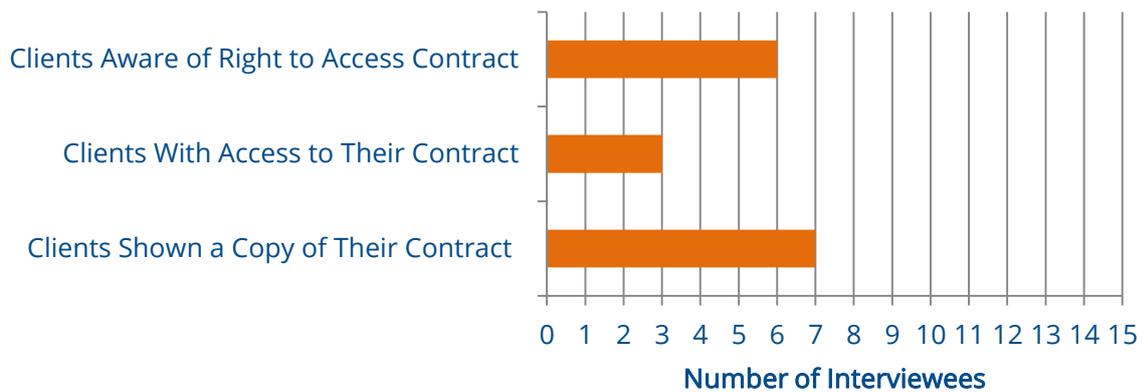


Figure five indicates the low levels of information that clients generally had about their job: these people did not know their employment status or whether they were on a part-time or zero-hours contract. When asked about how much they knew about their job and/or employer prior to starting work, a striking number of clients responded “nothing”, “very little” or “none”.

Figure Five: Levels of information about employment prior to start



Employers become elusive and uncommunicative when people raise problems

Employers (particularly agencies) seem impossible to contact once people start to experience issues with their working arrangements. Figure six shows the very high proportion of our research participants who experienced problems with this. Often interviewees did not know whom to contact: they had no knowledge

of a human resources department and how to approach it, or whether one existed at all. Our findings show that agencies rarely responded to e-mails, phone calls or letters once they learned that a client had a problem. They also appear to be largely unresponsive to any interventions made by ACAS. This lack of response can have a demoralising impact on clients and, in our experience, people are far more likely to focus on finding alternative employment than to attempt to start Employment Tribunal proceedings, if they have not succeeded in raising grievances with employers.

Figure Six: Clients reporting a lack of communication with agency/company, or an inability to contact employer once problems start



When trying to contact his employing agency to recover unpaid wages and get information about unfair dismissal, OJ's husband repeatedly encountered the same response: "every time we rung him we got the same answer, that they didn't know what was happening and they would be in touch when they did". ET recalled similar frustrations: "they [the agency] can use you to earn as much money as they want but as soon as you need them to help you, you've got nowhere to go". BL hit so many brick walls when trying to recover his holiday pay that he felt his former employers were trying to "play a game with me". BH believes that contractual arrangements with agencies should set up a closer working relationship with their employees, so that they are more liable to look out for their staff. In summary, agencies in particular seem to find it too easy to ignore their employees when they raise grievances.

Most interviewees never considered starting Employment Tribunal proceedings

As we made clear earlier in this report, we welcome the recent Supreme Court ruling to outlaw Employment Tribunal fees. Some interviewees, such as BL, did confirm that fees would have put him off starting tribunal proceedings, noting that since his grievance involved unpaid wages he would struggle to pay for a hearing. However, only one interviewee had been aware, prior to seeking advice from us, that an Employment Tribunal would involve fees. This clearly suggests that people may never even consider taking their grievances to a Tribunal, so the abolition of fees alone would not be sufficient to enable our respondents to resolve their problems. Most clients seemed too demoralised by their inability to raise grievances with their employers to consider pursuing a Tribunal claim, choosing instead to prioritise finding alternative employment.

In the absence of support from a solicitor or legal adviser, NX stated that he would not consider taking his claim to an Employment Tribunal because it would have been “a one-man band against a company”. MG expressed a similar view, that she would not consider pursuing a Tribunal claim because “it’s their word against mine”. Without specialist legal advice, and the ability to pay for it, the removal of Tribunal fees does little to help clients with limited knowledge of employment rights, and who have been made to feel powerless during their experiences in work.

Some people were disappointed with ACAS

A few clients reported some dissatisfaction here, particularly relating to the length of time it took ACAS to reply to enquiries and contact the employer involved. LH, who took his case to early conciliation through ACAS, said: “they're just slow, they didn't seem to want to help, they seemed to be on their [the company's] side, as if I was trying to rob them”. Commenting on ACAS' online information, MH stated that “I know about going on the internet, but a lot of that doesn't make any sense anyway, does it?”.

Our advice is significantly limited by resource constraints

Most interviewees were satisfied with the service they received from Citizens Advice Sheffield, many saying that it equipped them with knowledge that they did not previously have. However, none had been able to use this knowledge to

solve their problems at work themselves, in the absence of support through casework and representation. Without being able to offer this more intensive support, Citizens Advice Sheffield’s effectiveness in securing fair employment practices is clearly, frustratingly, limited.

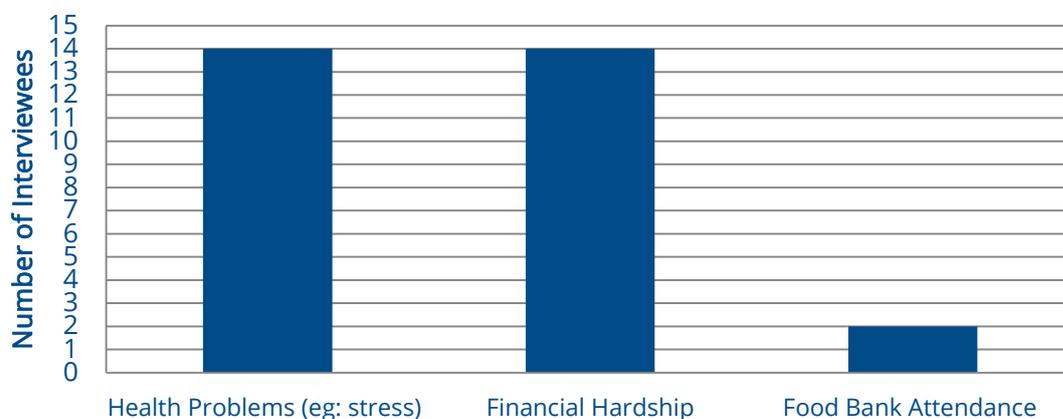
Problems stemming from insecure employment result in real hardship beyond the workplace

As figure seven shows, the majority of our interviewees reported that they have experienced financial hardship and health problems (commonly stress) due to their employment problems. While several interviewees stated that they had needed to go to friends or family for food, few had attended a food bank; a number expressed a degree of shame at the thought of doing so while working, and appeared unwilling to do this under almost any circumstances.

When discussing the amount of (unpaid) time she had to spend travelling between homes to deliver care, UC said the arrangement was “crazy”, because she was “out there for so long” but couldn’t “sit down even for ten minutes to drink or have some food” before she had to clock in again. When discussing her husband’s delivery job, OJ reported that “I used to give him sandwiches to take to work but he used to come back with them because he’d not stopped, if he stops he runs over his time limit and then he gets done for it”.

Having gone months without receiving pay for her work, TT said she felt “used”. Finally, following an unfair dismissal, MG said: “companies should not be allowed to do this to people, it destroys them, it’s knocked my confidence no end”.

Figure Seven: Issues arising from problems in employment



Conclusions and recommendations

“Relationships between employers and employees are generally characterised by an imbalance of economic power. Recognising the vulnerability of employees to exploitation, discrimination, and other undesirable practices, and the social problems which can result, Parliament has long intervened in those relationships so as to confer statutory rights on employees, rather than leaving their rights to be determined by freedom of contract.... In order for the rights conferred on employees to be effective, and to achieve the social benefits which Parliament intended, they must be enforceable in practice.”⁴

In December 2016 Citizens Advice Sheffield submitted evidence to the BEIS Select Committee inquiry into ‘The future world of work and rights of workers’.⁵ Discussions with our specialist employment adviser, looking at themes emerging from our clients’ enquiries, led us then to conclude that the central difficulty facing people with employment problems is the numerous barriers they face when trying to enforce their rights, and this is the key point we made in our submission.

Our investigation has reinforced this view. It is clear to us that some employers seem too comfortable in taking advantage of the uncertainties that come with more complex working arrangements. The options available for challenging them are inadequate, and do very little to deter employers from pursuing unfair practices. The key weakness in the current system is the lack of effective and proactive enforcement measures.

Moreover, we are not optimistic about the impact of changes in the pipeline. While we welcome many of Matthew Taylor’s recommendations, such as the importance of free mechanisms to establish one’s legal employment status, his report misses the crucial point that exploitative practices could be prevented at source if there were robust mechanisms for enforcement.

⁴ JUDGMENT R (on the application of UNISON) (Appellant) v Lord Chancellor (Respondent) <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2015-0233.html>

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<http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/business-energy-and-industrial-strategy-committee/future-world-of-work/written/44639.html>

We were also naturally delighted by the recent decision of the Supreme Court to outlaw Employment Tribunal fees⁶. However this does not change the fact that the onus of ensuring fair and lawful treatment at work rests disproportionately on the shoulders of ordinary people trying to make a living.

Furthermore, such employment casework and representation is time-consuming and highly specialist – a huge hurdle for even the most able and determined client seeking to pursue their own case. The restrictions on Citizens Advice Sheffield's service, and on the availability of trained employment solicitors, as a result of the drop in business following the withdrawal of legal aid, have only exacerbated the very real difficulties ordinary people face in attempting this.

At this critical juncture, when some progress towards fairer working arrangements is starting, Citizens Advice Sheffield believes the Government should strengthen its commitment to ending exploitative employment practices.

An environment hostile to exploitative practices and rewarding for ethical employers

Ideally, potential for exploitative practices should be eliminated systemically, at source, by creating a legal and commercial environment that discourages unfairness and – equally importantly – rewards ethical practice. As things stand, lower running costs resulting from workers' exploitation allow for lower prices, making it difficult for any organisation wishing to treat staff fairly to compete for contracts and customers, particularly when personal and public budgets are tight.

The Welsh Government, working with local authorities and trade unions, is using public sector purchasing power to ensure that publicly-funded contractors are following acceptable employment practices, expanding on an approach pioneered by the NHS in Wales.⁷ Though we could find no data on the impact of this model, clearly the NHS pilot was deemed successful enough for expansion. It has some potentially useful claws in the form of withdrawal of public money, though it also begs several questions, including how essential services would be delivered if no contractors met the ethical standards expected, for the level of

6 JUDGMENT R (on the application of UNISON) (Appellant) v Lord Chancellor (Respondent) <https://www.supremecourt.uk/cases/uksc-2015-0233.html>

7 'Code of practice: ethical employment in supply chains' Welsh Government, March 2017. <http://gov.wales/topics/improvingervices/bettervfm/code-of-practice/?lang=en>

funding on offer. These caveats aside, we see such action fitting well with the wider 'Fair City' agenda.

We recommend that the 'anchor institutions' in Sheffield – the City Council, the NHS, the universities and so on - consider using their procurement power to insist on ethical employment practices among their suppliers and contractors.

We also see potential for a local, public campaign to encourage Sheffield residents and visitors to use their own buying power to withdraw their custom from employers known to operate exploitative practices, and spend their money with ethical businesses instead.

We recommend that this local 'Fair Trade' campaign be initiated now, also under the 'Fair City' banner.

We can see a further way to create an environment which penalises or rewards employers financially, based on their treatment of their staff, by emulating the system of compulsory health and safety insurance through which all employers are required to indemnify themselves in case of injury to staff. Under our proposed model, organisations could be compelled to insure themselves against a wider range of employment issues, and workers would claim against this in the event of a grievance. A bad employer who lost a significant case or was the subject of numerous successful claims would either see the cost of their premiums rising, or find it impossible to get the insurance they need to operate lawfully, putting them out of business. On the other hand, good employers would be rewarded for with lower premiums and a 'no claims' bonus. With such insurance being an unavoidable legal requirement, the pressures of the commercial insurance market would be harnessed to change employers' behaviour for the better, as they already have done, dramatically, on health and safety.

We recommend that the Government considers legislating to make this insurance compulsory.

The Work and Pensions Select Committee inquiry into 'Self-employment and the gig economy'⁸ earlier this year criticised the pressure for workers to adopt so-

⁸ <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201617/cmselect/cmworpen/847/84702.htm>

called self-employment and challenged the notion that self-employment is the only way of achieving flexibility in working patterns. The Committee's report also noted how lack of clarity about employment status allows for exploitation by unscrupulous employers: their proposed solution was to establish a default assumption in law that an individual was a worker, with associated employment rights, unless their employer could prove conclusively otherwise.

We endorse the Select Committee's recommendation that this simple, powerful change be adopted.

Citizens Advice nationally has recommended the creation of a Fair Work Authority⁹, which, given the strong powers required, could help deter employers from behaving in the ways this report highlights. The Taylor review appears to have missed the crucial point that many employers are often quite content, indeed determined, to treat workers unfairly, and that they get away with this because there is no realistic prospect of challenge or penalty.

Though we did not explicitly discuss the idea of a Fair Work Authority with our interviewees, our research indicates a high degree of potential support for such a body. Having been unable to resolve his problem through ACAS, LH mentioned that the dispute resolution process could be made easier if "someone could phone him [his manager] up and tell him to pay me". MG also felt that it was too easy for the company she was working for, through an agency, to dismiss her unfairly: "companies can just kick you out as and when they feel like it, and the employee not be protected in any way, shape, or form". A number of clients also expressed a commonly-held opinion that, once they had encountered difficulties at work, they had "nowhere to go".

We wholeheartedly endorse Citizens Advice's recommendation for the creation of a Fair Work Authority, with substantial powers, to fill this void and provide people with a service capable of resolving their problems before they encounter the levels of hardship outlined above.

⁹ 'How Can Job Security Exist in the Modern World of Work?', Citizens Advice January 2017 <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/Global/CitizensAdvice/Work%20Publications/Recommendation%20event%20handout.pdf>

Earlier in this report we cited Middlesex University's estimate of the national economic impact of unpaid wages. Taking a local perspective, the London Borough of Newham has long recognised the impact of unfair employment practices on its residents, on other businesses trying to behave responsibly, and on benefit claims which, in essence, subsidise unscrupulous employers¹⁰. Working with the GMB, the local authority has called on central Government to devolve the enforcement of the national minimum wage to local authorities, with this service funded through the fines it would impose on non-compliant employers. Newham Council argues that this would be a natural extension of a local authority's existing contacts with, and knowledge of, local employers – through collection of business rates, for example.

We recommend that Sheffield City Council considers this model, and joins Newham in pressing central Government for the necessary legal change to allow for its implementation.

Unless and until the actions recommended above are adopted and begin to bite, there will remain the urgent need to support individuals in exercising their legal rights at work. While we welcome the recent abolition of Employment Tribunal fees, our research showed that clients who had not even realised that fees were payable (at the time) were already deterred by other factors from pursuing their case through this route, feeling that they did not have the necessary time or expertise themselves.

We therefore recommend that individuals' capacity to enforce their rights should be supported through funding for casework and representation services, including restoration of legal aid for employment matters to supplement first-tier advice provision.

¹⁰ <https://www.newham.gov.uk/Pages/News/Almost-one-in-five-Newham-residents-do-not-earn-the-minimum-wage.aspx>

Appendix: Interview summaries

UC works for several agencies as a nurse and a care provider. She is unsure about what her employment status is. UC contacted Citizens Advice Sheffield because she was not being paid fairly for the time she spent travelling between care homes, and because she had health problems being caused by strains of job.

BB worked as a self-employed van driver for an international online retail company, through an agency. He was not paid following a dispute over a damaged van, though he is adamant he did cause the damage. BB was on a fixed-term contract which has now ended. At the time of the interview he had still not been paid and was having difficulties contacting the agency.

BL was employed as a lorry driver. He experienced problems including unpaid wages, health and safety issues, and severe discrepancies between the job which was advertised to him and the responsibilities he had to undertake. Since leaving this job, he has had difficulty contacting his former employers to claim his unpaid wages.

BH worked as a self-employed personal trainer in a gym. He experienced an unfair dismissal following a dispute with his general manager who made accusations which BH believes to be unfounded. He was dismissed just hours before he was due to start a shift, and has had difficulties contacting his manager to get an explanation.

TT worked as a self-employed interpreter for a language and interpretation agency. The problem concerned unpaid wages and unexplained deductions from wages. The agency has not responded to her emails and phone calls.

GC was employed through an agency sorting parcels in a warehouse belonging to an international online retailer. He appears to have been on a fixed-term contract, but received no holiday pay and was released following the expiry of his contract without receiving this money. Also, he did not receive a P45, and has had problems contacting the agency since.

ET worked through an agency as an administrator in a large national public sector employer. He had regular problems with his payslips, and underpayment of wages sometimes amounted to £400-500. He believes the problems stemmed

from changes in the agency's staffing, resulting in communication issues when he tried to chase up his wages. He was later dismissed with no explanation.

GS worked as a personal carer on a zero-hours contract in a care home. She was injured at work and had difficulty claiming sick pay: her manager was not willing to fill in the necessary Statutory Sick Pay form for her because she was working on a zero-hours contract.

TC worked as a cleaner for a house building company. She experienced an issue concerning unpaid wages. Her manager informed her at the beginning of employment that she would need to work 'a week in hand' but she was later told she had to work 'a month in hand'. She was not paid for her first month's work.

NX worked as a bus and coach driver for a coach company. He experienced an unfair, on-the-spot dismissal which was never explained. He believes his dismissal may have been related to his appearance but has been unable to get an explanation.

MH was working as a senior carer for a care homes company, based at one of their sites. She experienced a potentially unfair dismissal during a seemingly routine meeting. No explanation was given at the time. MH believes her dismissal may have been related to her speaking out about the poor care provided by other members of staff.

LH worked as a van driver for a haulage company. Despite being reassured that he was not on a self-employed contract, it later emerged that he was indeed self-employed. Problems began when he noticed unexplained deductions of £25 from his weekly wage slips. Having eventually found out that he was on a self-employed contract, LH left the job, and he did not receive his final week's wages totalling £325.

MG worked as a receptionist for a large waste collection company, employed through an agency. She worked on a full-time basis but was unfairly dismissed after five days when a younger former employee was rehired by the waste collection company. Dismissal was unexplained, and appears to have been a case of age discrimination.

IC worked on a zero-hours contract in the kitchens of two take-away stores. She was initially told that she would be on a part-time contract, and it only emerged she was on zero hours when she was offered fewer shifts. Her problems

concerned unpaid wages and unpaid holiday pay. She had great difficulty contacting her employers and received no responses to her two grievance letters.

OJ spoke on behalf of her husband, who worked as a parcel delivery driver for an international online retailer, through an agency, on a self-employed contract. He reported numerous problems: he was not making his own tax returns, could not decide for himself when he worked and had unexplained deductions from wages made by a separate payroll company. He is owed around £3,000 in unpaid wages. The agency has reportedly gone into liquidation, but he was dismissed before he knew about this and cannot contact his former employers. OJ told us that a Facebook page had been set up by employees/ex-employees to discuss their problems.



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Citizens Advice Sheffield is the operating name of Sheffield Citizens Advice and Law Centre

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